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RECIDIVISM: A REVIEW OF  
SELECTED STUDIES

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## RECIDIVISM: A REVIEW OF SELECTED STUDIES

A Report Prepared for the Criminal Justice  
and Corrections Advisory Council

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This report contains excerpts from recent studies on recidivism among criminal offenders. The first part of the report addresses the rate at which offenders re-offend. The second part provides data on variables associated with recidivism. A bibliography of studies cited in this report can be found in the appendix.

The following excerpts were taken from a study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of Young Parolees, published in May 1987. The study was based on a sample of 3,995 parolees, representing 11,347 persons between the ages of 17 and 22, who were paroled from prisons in 22 states in 1978. These states accounted for 50 percent of all state prisoners paroled in the nation during that year.

- > Recidivism rates were highest in the first two years after an offender's release from prison.
  - \* Within one year, 32 percent of those paroled had been rearrested.
  - \* Within two years, 47 percent had been rearrested.
  
- > Within six years after their release from prison in 1978, of the 11,347 young parolees: an estimated 69 percent had been rearrested; 53 percent had been reconvicted; and 49 percent were reincarcerated. Recidivism rates were highest in the first two

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years for all three measures. Nearly one-fifth of those paroled were rearrested in the first six months, one-third in the first year, and nearly one-half by the end of the second year. Of all those who were rearrested during the six-year follow-up period, more than two-thirds were rearrested by the end of the second year.

- > Approximately one-fifth of all parolees were incarcerated within a year of their release from prison, and nearly a third were reincarcerated within two years. Of all those incarcerated within six years of parole, 62 percent were reincarcerated by the end of the second year.
- > Recidivism rates were highest among parolees with the longest criminal records. Among those with six or more previous adult arrests, 93 percent were arrested within six years, and 72 percent were reincarcerated. Among these rearrested parolees, the average (mean) time before their first arrest was 11 months. Half of these parolees, however, were rearrested within seven months (median time).
- > In contrast, among parolees with one previous arrest, 59 percent were rearrested within six years, and 42 percent returned to prison. In addition, "first-time offenders" who were rearrested averaged 23 months before their rearrest. The median time before rearrest was much longer; half were rearrested within 17 months.
- > Failure rates (defined as the number of parolees rearrested within a six-month period divided by the number not yet rearrested at the beginning of the

period) were consistently higher in the first three years among parolees with four or more prior arrests than among those with fewer prior arrests.

- > Length of prior record had no impact on the failure rate only among those surviving four or more years after their release from prison.
- > Ten percent of all persons paroled were rearrested only in states other than those in which they were paroled. Another 11 percent of the parolees were rearrested both in their paroling state and in another state. If data on rearrests had been restricted to the paroling states only, the overall rearrest rate would have been estimated at 59 percent rather than the actual 69 percent.

#### Comparison of BJS study with other studies:

- > The Repeat Offender Project, conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority<sup>2</sup>, found that 60 percent of a sample of 539 inmates released from Illinois prisons between April and June of 1983 were rearrested after 27 to 29 months. (The data included inmates of all ages, conditional and unconditional releases, and arrests for misdemeanors as well as felonies.)
- > A 1986 Rand Corporation study<sup>3</sup> found that after three years, the percentage rearrested was 76 percent in California, 60 percent in Texas, and 53 percent in Michigan.

- > A study conducted in Delaware, found that half (51.4 percent) of a sample of persons released from confinement between 1980 and 1982 were rearrested by September 30, 1982 (between 9 months and 36 months following release).
  
- > About a third (32.7 percent) of inmates released from North Carolina prisons in FY79-80 were returned to those prisons within three years because of a new prison sentence or a parole revocation.,.
  
- > A Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Returning to Prisons, found that close to a third of the prisoners in 14 states returned to prison within three years.
  
- > According to the 1979 Survey of Inmates in State Facilities,, the rate of return to prison was estimated nationwide to be 29.4 percent within three years and 39.9 percent within six years.

The following excerpts were taken from a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, Examining Recidivism<sup>7</sup>. This study involved a nationwide survey of inmates of state prisons conducted in October and November of 1979.

- > It is estimated that nearly half (48.7 percent) of all those who exit prison will return within 20 years of release. Most of the recidivism, however was found to occur within the first three years after release: 28.7 percent return to prison within one year of release; 48.1 percent within two years; and 60.3 percent of those who will return to prison within 20 years will do so by the end of the third year.
- > An estimated 41.6 percent of those entering prison in 1979 were either on probation (21.1 percent) or parole (20.5 percent) for prior offenses at the time of their admission.
- > According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics study, Returning to Prison<sup>8</sup>, 14-15 percent of inmates return to prison within the first year after release, another ten percent during the second year, and another five percent during the third year. About 30 percent of all releases were found to return to prison within three years.

The following excerpts were taken from a National Institute of Justice study, Granting Felons Probation<sup>9</sup>. This study used California Board of Prison Terms information on every person sentenced to California state prisons in 1980, and the same information for a sample of adult males who were sentenced to probation

in 1986 after having convicted in Superior Court, for a 40-month follow-up period.

- > For felony probationers, the median time from probation grant or release from jail to first official filed charge (not arrest) was: 15 months for drug offenders with no sharp increase or decrease over the 40-month follow-up period; five months for property offenders; and eight months for violent offenders. After 27 months none of the property or violent offenders who had not already had an arrest leading to a filed charge, subsequently had one.
- > Sixty-five percent of the felony probationers were arrested during the 40-month follow-up period. Fifty-one percent of those were charged and convicted, and 18 percent were convicted of serious violent crimes.

<u>During 40-month Follow Up</u>		
	<u>% With No Arrest</u>	<u>% W/ 5 or more Arrests</u>
Property Offenders	33%	16%
Drug Offenders	43%	12%
Violent Offenders	40%	12%



## RECIDIVISM RATES: VARIABLES

The followings excerpts were taken from the Bureau of Justice Statistics report, Recidivism of Young Parolees.

- > Parolees who had graduated from high school or had some college education had lower recidivism rates than those who had failed to finish high school.
- > Almost three-quarters of the property offenders paroled in 1978 were rearrested within six years compared to about two-thirds of the violent offenders and nearly half of the drug offenders. Property offenders also had a higher rate of reconviction and reincarceration than did other types of offenders.
- > Parolees whose only or most serious offense was a drug offense had the lowest rates of recidivism: 49 percent were rearrested, 30 percent reconvicted, and 25 percent reincarcerated.
- > Parolees were often rearrested for the same type of crime for which they had served time in prison; for example, 41 percent of the paroled burglars, more than any other group of parolees, were arrested for burglary within the six-year period.
- > Property offenders (32 percent) were as likely as violent offenders (33 percent) to be arrested for a violent crime after their release from prison. Property offenders were, however, much more likely than violent offenders to be arrested for a new property offense (59 percent vs. 35 percent).

4. Parolees as Offenders - Parolees for which they were paroled, persons with a prior arrest for a violent offense had a greater likelihood of arrest for another violent offense than other parolees.
- > Property offenders with a prior arrest for a violent offense (10 percent of all parolees) had the highest rates of rearrest. An estimated 80 percent of the released property offenders who had a previous arrest for a violent crime were arrested for a new offense within a six-year period, including 43 percent for a new violent crime. Among property offenders without any previous arrests and those with arrests for nonviolent offenses only, 72 percent were rearrested, including approximately 30 percent for a violent offense.
  - > Violent offenders who had no previous arrests were the least likely of all offender types to be rearrested (51 percent).
  - > More than half (51 percent) of the new charges were for property offenses. Eighteen percent were violent offenses; nine percent were drug offenses; eighteen percent were public-order offenses; and three percent unspecified felonies.
  - > Twenty-nine percent of the new charges occurred before parolees were first eligible for discharge from parole. Three out of ten arrest charges occurred while still on parole, and 37 percent were rearrested while still on parole.

- > Nineteen percent of the new offenses were charged to five percent of the rearrested parolees and 49 percent of the new offenses were charged to 20 percent of the rearrested parolees. Ten percent of all parolees were arrested for 40 percent of new offenses.

The following excerpts were taken from a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, Examining Recidivism<sup>7</sup>.

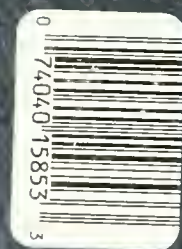
- > An estimated 61 percent of those admitted to prison in 1979 were recidivists. Of those entering without a history of incarceration (an estimated 30 percent of all admissions), nearly 60 percent had prior convictions that resulted in probation, and an estimated 27 percent were on probation at the time of their admission.
- > An estimated 46 percent of the recidivists entering prison in 1979 would still have been in prison at the time of their admission if they had fully served the maximum term of their last sentence to confinement. This group, referred to as "avertable recidivists", constituted 28 percent of all those who entered prison in 1979. They also accounted for approximately 20 percent of the violent crimes, 28 percent of the burglaries and auto thefts, 30 percent of the fraud/forgery/embezzlement offenses, and 31 percent of stolen property offenses.

## APPENDIX

1. Beck, Allen J., Recidivism of Young Parolees, BJS Special Report, NCJ-104916, May 1987.
2. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, The Pace of Recidivism in Illinois, Research Bulletin, Number 2, April 1986.
3. Klein S., and M. Caggiano, The Prevalence Predictability, and Policy Implications of Recidivism (Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1986).
4. Delaware Statistical Analysis Center, Recidivism in Delaware-A Study of Rearrest After Release From Incarceration, December 1984.
5. Clarke, S., and L. Crum, Returns to Prison in North Carolina (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, Institute of Government, 1985).
6. Wallerstedt, J., Returning to Prison, BJS Special Report, NCJ-95700, November 1984.
7. Greenfeld, L., Examining Recidivism, BJS Special Report, NCJ-96501, February 1985.
8. Petersilia, Joan, et al, Granting Felons Probation, NIJ Study (Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1985).







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